

# Local Community Network

## Dowsborough LCN meeting notes

12<sup>th</sup> March 2025

Victory Hall, Stogursey

### Attendees:

Simon Stretton (Chair)  
Mike Caswell (Vice Chair)  
John Vassilli, Durleigh  
Steve Skinner, Kilve  
Kevin Ferriday, Nether Stowey  
Tina Gardener, Otterhampton & Fiddington  
Connie Sanders, Otterhampton  
John McVerry, Stockland Bristol  
Chris Morgan, Stogursey  
Bridget Hedeaux, Wembdon  
Paul King, Wembdon  
Karen Scott, Kilve  
John Roberts, Nether Stowey  
Patrick Tully, Over Stowey  
Sue Goss, Stogursey  
Mark Weston, Rep. Ashley Fox MP  
Matt Barrow, Stakeholder Engagement Officer, Connecting Devon & Somerset (guest)  
Amanda Williams, Snr Economic Development Officer/CDS Lead, Somerset Council (guest)

Anne Shilton, LCN Link Officer  
Sam Murrell, LCN Link Officer  
Callum Davey, Tech support

### Virtual attendees:

Sarah Bennett, Village Agent

### Apologies:

Cllr Hugh Davies  
Cllr Brian Bolt  
Iain Porter, Quantocks Landscape Partnership  
Lin Hook, Chilton Trinity  
Peter Felton, Chilton Trinity

## 1. Welcome and any apologies

The Chair, Simon Stretton introduced the meeting, welcomed the room and online attendees and thanked Stogursey Parish Council for hosting the LCN meeting.

Apologies were received as noted above.

## 2. Agreement of notes from previous meeting – 29<sup>th</sup> January 2025

Notes agreed.

## 3. Presentation on Connectivity (Broadband)

Matt Barrow from the Connecting Devon and Somerset (CDS) programme discussed the connectivity issues in the region. He explained the programme's objectives, the historical context and the challenges faced in delivering superfast broadband to rural areas.

**Historical Context:** M Barrow explained the historical context of the connectivity programme, highlighting its establishment by the government about 10 years ago to improve broadband speeds in rural areas.

**Challenges:** He discussed the challenges faced in delivering superfast broadband, including the limitations of existing infrastructure and the complexities of upgrading to higher speeds.

**Programme Objectives:** M Barrow highlighted the programme's goal to bring properties up to 30 Mbps speeds and the complications arising from the Gigabit agenda. He emphasized the widening digital divide and the need for decent connectivity.

**Airband Contract Issues:** M Barrow explained the issues with Airband's contract, which led to a halt in their delivery. He detailed the negotiations and the need to find alternative solutions for the affected properties. He described the lengthy negotiations with Airband, which ultimately resulted in the company being unable to complete the contracts and seeking to exit them. Matt emphasized the need to find alternative solutions for the 28,000 properties that Airband could not connect, highlighting the complexity of the situation.

**Project Gigabit:** M Barrow discussed the funding for the next phase of connectivity through Project Gigabit, aiming to deliver Gigabit-capable speeds by 2030. He explained the different contract types and the role of Building Digital UK in managing these contracts including local, regional, and national contracts, and how they are structured to address various connectivity needs. M Barrow described the role of Building Digital UK (BDUK) in managing these contracts, emphasizing their responsibility in overseeing the implementation of Project Gigabit.

**Community Concerns:** Paul King from Wembdon Parish Council raised concerns about the infrastructure and the use of aerial fibre. M Barrow responded by explaining the challenges with existing infrastructure and the limitations of using poles. M Barrow explained the challenges with using existing infrastructure, including the condition of poles and the complexities involved in upgrading them.

**Airband's Financial Issues:** M Barrow explained that Airband's investor decided to stop funding due to the high costs and low returns leading to a halt in their delivery efforts. He emphasized the need for alternative solutions and the potential use of

the voucher scheme including the potential use of the government's voucher scheme to support connectivity efforts.

**Community Impact:** Mike Caswell from the board of CDS expressed frustration with the delays and the negative impact on local businesses and residents. M Barrow acknowledged the difficulties and explained the ongoing efforts to address the connectivity issues, including lobbying for better coverage and exploring alternative solutions.

**Planning and Connectivity:** Kevin Ferriday from Nether Stowey requested that connectivity be considered in planning applications to avoid worsening the situation. M Barrow confirmed that it is now a legal requirement for developers to ensure fibre is present in new developments.

M Barrow was asked to return in 6 to 12 months to give an update on any progress or otherwise regarding the CDS programme, to which he agreed.

#### 4. Highways Working Group

A productive online meeting has been held with Nick Margison who is the SC officer responsible for the Slinky transport project. The project continues to be well used across the county and there will be an investment in more vehicles shortly to increase passenger capacity from 12 to around 18 for each trip and these will now be livered with the Slinky logo. Following a pilot around Somerton, the online/digital booking service will now be expanded across the county, so that passengers can book online if they wish. They will also be able to continue booking by phone too. This should help streamline the service and respond better to demand as a new software programme will be able to plan routes effectively. The buses will continue to pick up passengers at their homes or a bus stop. The Slinky service will connect people to the new transport hub in Bridgwater from where other services can be accesses such as a connection to the hospital in Taunton. Leaflets are no longer available, but all the information is on the website, including ticket costs. [SLINKY – Transport on demand](#). Currently, up to 3 miles travel is £2.50 single and £4.00 return. Over 3 miles travel is £3.50 single and £5.00 return.

A highways working group meeting was held on 28<sup>th</sup> February 2025 and the notes have been circulated. It was attended by three officers from the Highways department and that was appreciated. Fortunately the staffing levels in that department were not as badly affected by the restructuring as originally planned. The transport movements for Hinckley Point C are all noted on parish online, linked with Nether Stowey, Stogursey, Otterhampton, Fiddington and Cannington. The next highways meeting date will be notified shortly.

#### 5. Update on boundary suggestion

The neighbouring LCN in Bridgwater had explored the option of changing their boundary to include nearby parishes. Wembdon parish were considering the option, along with Puriton PC. Wembdon have decided not to go ahead at this point and will remain as part of the Dowsborough LCN but they have not dismissed the proposal entirely. Link Officer to report this back to Bridgwater LCN

## 6. Topics, themes or speakers for the future, including AGM on 19<sup>th</sup> June 2025

A request had been made for suggested topics, themes or speakers for future meetings. J Roberts had suggested Connectivity (broadband) and rural transport and appreciated the speaker earlier from CDS but nothing regarding transport. It was hoped that the meeting regarding the Slinky project would address some of these concerns. Some places have access to the temporary HPC buses or to buses serving school children but not a reliable rural bus service for each village. But there is concern about the situation when these service buses are removed in a few years time. M Weston suggested inviting Natasha Bates from SC, who is responsible for the Bus Service Improvement Project, as a speaker as well as a speaker from First Bus. Link Officer to invite N Bates to a future meeting.

Link Officer said that she'd been in touch with Somerset Community Foundation regarding a rural transport programme/community bus, which would need to be evidenced to gain grant funding and would invite them along to talk if wanted at the AGM. This would most likely need a working or steering group and invited anyone interested to contact the Link Officer to explore this option. However this was not the preferred option and a reliable, regular bus service is wanted.

It was suggested that a topic to be explored would be to encourage younger people to become involved with parish councils.

A request was made to have a speaker from SC's planning department to explain their methodology of assessing planning. Link Officer to explore this further, whilst being mindful of known short staffing in that department.

A request was made for a speaker from the Environment Agency. Link Officer confirmed that this could be an opportunity for the next meeting, the AGM.

**Rural Transport Issues:** J Roberts from Nether Stowey raised concerns about the lack of a reliable rural bus service to support local residents and businesses. He emphasized the need for a proper rural transport system to support local residents and businesses. He highlighted the impact of inadequate transport services on the community, including difficulties for residents in accessing work and essential services. J Roberts called for action to address the rural transport issues, requesting that representatives from relevant authorities attend future meetings to discuss potential solutions.

**Future of Community Transport:** Link Officer discussed the potential for HPC legacy funding to support a community transport option for the Dowsborough area. She suggested forming a working group to explore this idea further.

**Funding Potential:** Link officer suggested the potential for HPC legacy funding to support a community transport option for the Dowsborough area, highlighting the need for sustainable transport solutions. She suggested forming a working group to explore the idea further and develop a proposal for utilizing the HPC legacy funding to support community transport initiatives. Interested parties to contact [dowsboroughlcn@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:dowsboroughlcn@somerset.gov.uk)

**Planning Department Issues:** Ian Dyer highlighted the ongoing issues with the planning department, including a lack of response and support. He asked for a representative from the planning department to attend a future meeting to address these concerns.

**7. Any other business**

None.

**8. Date of next meeting**

AGM on Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> June 2025 at Wembdon Village Hall at 6.30 pm. In person only, not a hybrid meeting.

**9. Dates for future meetings**

17<sup>th</sup> September 2025, 10<sup>th</sup> December 2025, 18<sup>th</sup> March 2026, 17<sup>th</sup> June 2026 (AGM)

Date	Action	Completed by
12/03/2025	Invite M Barrow, CDS to return for update at meeting on either 17th September 2025 or 10th December 2025.	Link Officer
	Highways working group meeting, May 2025, date tbc.	Link Officer
	Feedback boundary response to Bridgwater LCN.	Link Officer
	Invite N Bates, SC, to future meeting re BSIP.	Link Officer
	Invite speaker from First Bus to future meeting re rural services	Link Officer
	Rural transport working group – open invite. Date/time tbc.	Link Officer
	Invite speaker from Planning Dept	Link Officer
	Confirm speaker from Environment Agency	Link Officer